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ABSTRACT

This study compares students in a living-learning program with those in a conventional program. Attitudes and perceptions of the learning environment were the variables measured during the students' fourth semester in college. The learning environment variables were: democratic governance, undergraduate learning, freedom, and concern for innovation. Attitude variables used were: the thinking introversion, theoretical orientation, estheticism, and complexity of outlook scales of the Omnibus Personality Inventory; the community and peers scales of the Alienation Index; and the concepts of interpersonal relationships, community, and independence autonomy as measured by the Semantic Differential. Significant differences were found in undergraduate learning, freedom, thinking introversion, and complexity of outlook. It was concluded that: (1) a distinctive educational environment can be created within a subunit of a large university; (2) students attracted have strong academic and intellectual interests; (3) faculty participation should be at the invitation of students; (4) programs should not exceed 250 students; and (5) the parent institution should encourage autonomy for innovative programs. (JS)

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PROJECT 10

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF AN INNOVATIVE LIVING-LEARNING PROGRAM

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It has been charged that the large size of institutions of higher education is primarily responsible for the malaise felt by many students and which is reflected in their feeling that most of the formal course offerings are irrelevant to their lives, both present and future. They feel "turned-off" by the experience and attribute the cause to largeness. Students feel depersonalized.

To provide a laboratory for change, to encourage innovation within largeness, but without having to commit the entire institution to untested changes, the living-learning and cluster college models have been suggested for organizing universities for the improvement of undergraduate education. Four factors are thought to be the necessary preconditions for innovation leading to personalized learning. These are: 1) small size, 2) frequent, face-to-face relationships between faculty and students, 3) a significant measure of self-determination, and, 4) a feeling of community. When these factors compose a learning environment, then students and faculty will be able to work effectively together toward new and better ways to organize and conduct higher education.

Essentially, a living-learning unit is one or a group of student dormitories in which students live and meet most of their classes. The instructors who lead these classes often have their offices located in these dormitories. Other

academic-related activities are also centered in the residence. In contrast, the cluster college also has these features, but is actually a mini-college. It is a semi-autonomous academic unit, headed by a dean, and usually has several academic disciplines represented. Often there is a special curricular emphasis. In the living-learning unit the faculty members maintain close ties with their departments; in the cluster, the point of identity is the college.

Research Findings. Several of these innovative programs have been established and some have been the subject of empirical investigation into the consequences of their operation. Specifically, investigators have been interested in change and development in students and the nature of the learning environment.

In several studies, students in the living-learning programs and those in the regular university programs have been compared. When a measure of academic performance was used as a criterion, no significant differences were reported. (DeCoster, 1969; Neville, 1966; Adams, 1967; Olson, 1964; Olson, 1965; Pemberton, 1968; Blackburn, 1968). On personality dimensions, some students reported they changed a great deal, i.e., they became more independent and developed a greater understanding of self and others. (Blackburn, 1968). However, these results did not appear in all investigations. (Walsh & McKinnon, 1969). As for the learning environment, living-learning students saw the faculty as helpful, attentive and challenging, perceived a more informal yet scholarly

atmosphere (that is, there was more discussion in class, and more out-of-class, academic-related discussion with other students.) (College Management, 1967; Olson, 1964). They were more satisfied with the college experience (that is, the curriculum and courses were seen as superior) (Neville, 1966). On the other hand, some studies report opposite results. (Dugmore, 1968; Blackburn, 1968)

Studies of the semi-autonomous cluster college indicate similar results (Newcomb, et al., 1969). In the experimental unit at the University of Michigan, after two years in the experience, students scored significantly higher on CUES Community (a friendly, cohesive, group-oriented campus), Campus Morale (commitment to intellectual pursuits and freedom of expression), Quality of Teaching and Faculty-Student Relationships (teaching infused with warmth, interest, and helpfulness towards students.)

Project 10. This version of the living-learning model was launched at the University of Massachusetts in 1968. Project 10 was conceived on the proposition that the goal of education is to produce people who behave in an independent fashion, who demonstrate their concern and involvement with the surrounding world by their direct actions, and who are "hooked" on a lifelong path of growth through learning. The architects of the project sought to create conditions that would encourage participating students to become concerned with worthwhile goals, both academic and personal, to become committed to these goals, and to translate these goals into

plans of action. The planners sought to devise an environment that would encourage students and faculty, through innovation and experimentation, to evolve new patterns of living, classroom scheduling and student-faculty relationships that would involve freshman students in the intellectual college experience. The students wanted the experience to be oriented toward "study in depth rather than the survey approach, problem-solving rather than questions and answers and the discovery of information rather than the conveyance of it."

These aims began to evolve in October, 1967 when a group of twenty-five undergraduate students began talking about developing a combined residential and educational program at the University of Massachusetts. The initial inspiration came from an undergraduate student and an academic administrator who had earlier attended a conference on residential colleges. The undergraduates who devised the plan wanted an alternative to the present system; they wanted to form a "small, semi-autonomous community where students would be able to think for themselves and develop according to their own needs."

The plan that won administration approval called for a two year evolution. During the first year approximately 250 freshman students, both men and women, would share two adjacent residence halls with a group of junior and senior honors students. In the second year, the freshmen-turned sophomores would be joined by approximately 150 entering

freshmen. Class scheduling was planned for Project students to meet at least two and up to five (all) of their courses within Project buildings. Selected upperclassmen, called Undergraduate Teaching Residents (UTR), were to provide guidance, acting a role that would be part personal counselor and part academic tutor. Seeking "highly motivated and independent individuals," a brochure describing the project and its aims was sent to 2000 prospective freshmen. The description stated that the project was planned for students interested in "living and studying together in ways different from those ordinarily encountered in the first two years at a large university...It will evolve according to the needs discovered in its operation each year." (White and Gilmore, 1969, p. 3). Personal interviews with Project student leaders was the method of final selection.

Study Plan. During the Spring of 1970, after nearly two years of operation, a study was conducted to determine where Project 10 students and faculty were in relation to their efforst to create a unique learning environment. The research compared Project 10 students with a sample from a population of students similar with respect to campus residence area, academic class and academic potential. Comparisons were made on both learning environment variables and personality traits. Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance.

Results. Findings from the literature and the goals of Project 10 led to the formulation of several hypotheses; these and the findings are as follows:

1. Project 10 students will perceive a higher level of concern for undergraduate learning.

> Concern for undergraduate learning has to do with the degree to which the college -- in its structure, function, and professional commitment of faculty -- emphasizes undergraduate teaching and learning. A high score suggests a faculty of active student involvement in the learning enterprise, and institutional rewards for good teaching. A low score indicates either that undergraduate instruction stands relatively low as an institutional priority, or else the perception that, for whatever reasons, the quality of teaching at the college is generally somewhat poor.

Project 10 students saw the faculty as "generally disposed towards personalized teaching of undergraduates" and encouraging "active student involvement in the learning process."

2. Project 10 student will perceive a closer self-to-peers distance. There was no difference on this dimension.

3. Project 10 students will perceive a stronger sense of community.

> This concept describes an environment which is supportive and sympathetic and is seen as congenial and cohesive. There is a feeling of group welfare and group loyalty which encompasses the community as a whole.

They did not differ in their perception of community defined as an environment which is supportive and cohesive.

4. Project 10 students will show a stronger interest in intellectual matters. (This is measured by the Thinking Introversion, Theoretical Orientation, Estheticism and Complexity of Outlook Scales of the Omnibus Personality Inventory (Heist and Yong,1968).

Thinking Introversion. Persons scoring high on this measure are characterized by a liking for reflective thought and academic activities. They express interests in a broad range of ideas found in a variety of areas, such as literature, art and philosophy. Their thinking is less dominated by immediate conditions and situations, or by commonly accepted ideas, than that of thinking extroverts (low scorers).

Theoretical Orientation. This scale measures an interest in, or orientation to, a more restricted range of ideas than is true of TI. High scorers indicate a preference for dealing with theoretical concerns and problems and for using the scientific method in thinking; many are also exhibiting an interest in science and scientific activities. High scorers are generally logical, analytical, and critical in their approach to problems or situations.

Estheticism. High scorers endorse statements indicating diverse interests in artistic matters and activities and a high level of sensitivity and response to esthetic stimulation. The content of the statements in this scale extends beyond painting, sculpture and music, and includes interests in literature and dramatics.

Complexity of Outlook. This measure reflects an experimental and flexible orientation rather than a fixed way of viewing and organizing phenomena. High scorers are tolerant of ambiguities and uncertainties; they are fond of novel situations and ideas. Most persons high on this dimension prefer to deal with complexity, as opposed to simplicity, and very high scorers are disposed to seek out and to enjoy diversity and ambiguity.

On some personality traits, Project 10 students differed significantly from others. They expressed a greater liking for reflective thought and academic activities (Thinking Introversion) and were more interested in activities which reflected an experimental and flexible approach to phenomena (Complexity of Outlook). On the other hand, they did not differ on interests in theoretical concerns and problems and for using the scientific method (Theoretical Orientation) nor interest in aesthetic matters and activities (Estheticism).

5. Project 10 students will find and value interpersonal relationships and independence - autonomy more strongly. (This was measured using the Semantic Differential Technique (Osgood, et al., 1957).

> Interpersonal Relationships. This concept refers to a close friendship defined as a relationship between equals with no sense of possessiveness involved. In more general terms, this means close personal friendship with others but not dependence on them.
>
> Independence-Autonomy. This refers to a self-directedness and independence of authority as traditionally imposed through social institutions. Independent people appear to be "inner-directed" and tend to be realistic.

There were no differences on these dimensions.

6. Project 10 students will perceive an environment where there is a greater concern for innovation. (The following three hypotheses employ dimensions of the Institutional Functioning Inventory (Peterson, 1969).

> Concern for Innovations. Concern for innovation refers, in its highest form, to an institutionalized commitment to experimentation with new ideas for educational practice. A high score reflects the view that senior administrators are receptive to new ideas, that people are encouraged to innovate and experiment at all levels, and that significant changes (e.g., in the curriculum) have in fact been made in recent years. Low scores could imply traditionalism, complacency, or opposition to change in the college community.

Project 10 students did not perceive their environment as differing in the extent to which people were encouraged to innovate and experiment with new ideas for educational practice.

7. Project 10 students will perceive an environment

where there is a greater concern for academic freedom.

> Freedom. Freedom has to do with academic freedom for faculty and students as well as freedom in their personal lives for all individuals in the campus community. High scores imply that respondents perceive themselves to be essentially free to discuss topics of their own choosing, to organize groups of their own choosing, to invite controversial speakers, and to be relatively free of college restrictions on their personal conduct and activities. Low scores suggest an institution that places many restraints on the academic and personal lives of faculty and students.

Project 10 students perceived an environment where persons were able to discuss topics and form associations of their own choosing, that is, they saw very little constraint on their activities, both academic and personal.

8. Project 10 students will perceive an environment where the system of government reflects the influence of all parties.

> Democratic Governance. Democratic Governance has to do with the extent to which individuals in the campus community who are directly affected by a decision have the opportunity to participate in making the decision. High scores signify extensive and meaningful faculty and student involvement in institutional affairs, decentralized decision-making, and shared (horizontal) rather than hierarchial (or vertical) organizational arrangements. Low scores suggest authoritarianism -- authority and power tightly held (typically by an administrative clique) in a "top-down" administrative framework.

Project 10 students failed to see themselves as being any more able to participate in decisions that directly affected them than did other students.

In this study academic achievement, as reflected in any form of academic average, was not used as a criterion.

Discussion. Project 10 students sought to make themselves somewhat independent from their parent institution. That they perceived a greater degree of personal and academic freedom can be interpreted as a success. But it also can be seen as a failure because of what this freedom should have made possible but did not. Specifically, Project 10 students apparently were not able to evolve a satisfactory from of self-government -- one that would give those it served a feeling that it was responsive and valuable. Also, Project 10 students did not see a learning climate that was encouraging for educational innovation and change. Project 10 was initiated with innovation as a goal; therefore, this finding also may be considered a failure.

Success was achieved in the area of student-faculty relationships. Students either knew their instructors personally or knew that they were concerned about them as students. Project 10 students more frequently endorsed items such as: "Professors get to know most students in their undergraduate classes quite well," "capable undergraduates are encouraged to collaborate with faculty research projects or to carry out studies of their own," and "most faculty members are quite sensitive to the interests, needs and aspirations of undergraduates."

These findings suggest that factors other than small size are important in personalizing education. First, by holding classes in the residence hall, the classes are composed of students who are acquainted with each other because they live in the same place. Learning occurs with friends, thus facilitating disucssion. Also, ideas generated in class can be

easily carried back to the informal living situation. Living and learning are brought together. Second, the students invited faculty members to lead the classes; they were successful in choosing faculty who were interested in teaching students. In each case these arrangements can be accomplished whether the academic unit is large or small.

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